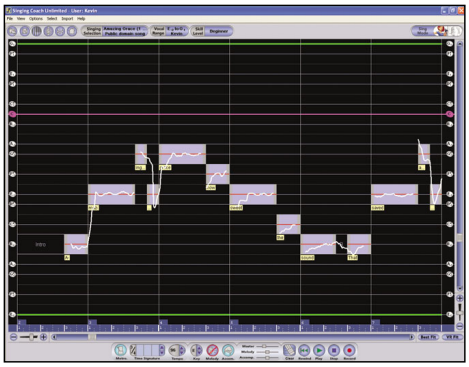
Carry-A-Tune Technologies Singing Coach



Singing Coach
$49.95 (Standard);
$99.95 (Unlimited)
Carry-A-Tune Technologies
www.carryatune.com

Everyone sings; whether it's in church or just in the shower. Singing Coach is a fun program that can help you sing better by learning to control your voice and evaluate your own singing.

The program's two main parts are lessons and a Singing mode. In both, you sing into an included headset microphone, and the app shows your actual pitch compared to the note you're trying to hit. You can view notes as sheet music or a graph.

The 20 lessons take a few hours to complete and show how to use your voice and stay on key. They can be repetitive, but humor makes them enjoyable. There's a downright-funny introductory cartoon and humorous 1950s-style educational film about breath control. The lessons are thorough without much emphasis on music theory but might be too easy for some. I'm not an extraordinary singer by any means, but I frequently scored 97% to 100% during the tutorial.

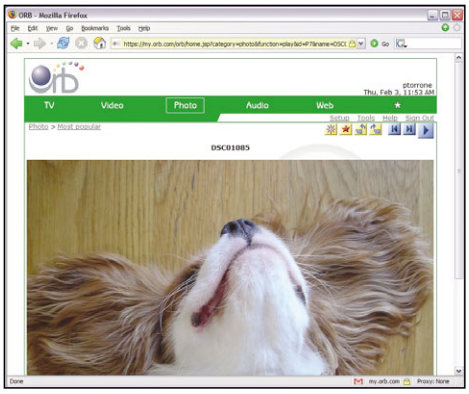
In Singing mode you can change the difficulty level. Intermediate and Advanced levels have less tolerance for off-key singing. A pitch meter moves as you sing, letting you quickly adjust if you're off-key. When the song is done, the app scores you based on your pitch and difficulty. You can play the tune back and hear your voice as others hear you. Singing Coach adapts itself to your vocal range, so lessons and songs play in a key you're comfortable with. (Turns out that I'm a baritone.)

The Standard version includes 12 built-in songs, and you download four more free. (You'll be singing lots of familiar tunes, such as "Amazing Grace" and "When The Saints Go Marching In.") The Unlimited version includes 24 songs and 12 free downloads, and you can import MIDI files and compose your own tunes.

Singing Coach can only take you so far, but it does a great job showing your pitch and tempo relative to where it should be. ▲

by Kevin Savetz

Orb Networks Orb



Orb
$9.99 (monthly); $79.99 (flat fee)
Orb Networks
www.orb.com

"Play. Anything. Anywhere." That's the tagline for Orb Networks' new mobile media service, and it sums things up nicely. Orb works with a Windows Media Center PC, broadband connection, and Internet-connected mobile device to give you access to all of your media files at any time.

Getting started is surprisingly simple. Sign up for an account (new users get 30 days free), download the software, and install it on your Windows XP Media Center PC. Orb automatically finds all your media files, including MP3 music, digital photos, and TV shows. (Live TV is supported with an optional TV tuner.) To access your files, just sign in to your Orb account via your mobile device, including laptop, Windows Mobile or Pocket PC handhelds with Wi-Fi access, Windows Smartphones, and various Nokia phones with RealPlayer or Windows Media Player loaded.

The concept is brilliant, and I had no problems in my tests. Orb simply works. There were instances where it was difficult or impossible to get an Internet connection with a mobile phone, but that was due to poor cell phone coverage in some areas. Wi-Fi worked best with mobile devices, providing good speed without the spotty coverage issues inherent in cellular technology. For security, your files stay on your PC and aren't uploaded to Orb's servers. No firewall changes are needed, and when you access your files, data is sent via 128- or 256-bit encryption.

Orb's price is reasonable, considering the time you can save accessing media files by not having to save your movies and music to a memory card or drive. After the free trial expires, the service is $9.99 a month or $79.99 a year. You can add users to your account for $3.99 a month or $29.99 a year. As of this writing, Orb doesn't support Palm OS devices or any desktop OS but Windows XP Media Center. ▲

by Jen Edwards

CPU Ranking: 0 = Absolutely Worthless 2.5 = Absolutely Average 5 = Absolutely Perfect